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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0439
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2203
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5286
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000622

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [KPKO](#) [MOPS](#)
TH, BM, LA, SU
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSS BILATERAL
TIES, BURMA, HMONG, DARFUR, IPR

REF: CHIANG MAI 29 (KNU ASSASSINATION)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a February 26 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama made and then announced to the press an impromptu decision to visit Washington for the March 20 anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce and meet with Secretary Rice. Responding to the Ambassador's expression of concern over the status of Hmong refugees, Noppadon said the Lao government seemed willing to consider the resettlement to a third country of Hmong in Thailand, and willing to allow international monitoring of Hmong returnees to Laos. Referring to an ongoing investigation, Noppadon deflected the Ambassador's expression of concern over the assassination in Thailand of a leader of the Karen National Union; Noppadon explained he would travel to Burma in early March and pursue a policy of "neighborly engagement." Noppadon said the RTG remains ready to deploy a battalion of troops for peacekeeping in Darfur. He requested assistance in Thailand's removal from the Special 301 Priority Watch List. Septel reports the portion of the discussion on Kosovo. End Summary.

175TH ANNIVERSARY AND HIGH LEVEL VISITS

12. (C) The Ambassador paid his first official call on Foreign Minister Noppadon Pattama on February 26. Noppadon thanked the Ambassador for the USG lifting restrictions on assistance to Thailand, following the inauguration of the democratically elected government headed by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej.

Samak hoped to combine his participation in the September UN General Assembly with a visit to Washington. The Ambassador said that a meeting between Samak and President Bush could prove difficult around the time of the UNGA, but that it would be good for the two leaders to meet sometime this year.

13. (C) The Ambassador noted the 175th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce provided a good opportunity to publicize the value of the U.S.-Thai relationship. If Noppadon were to travel to Washington for the March 20 anniversary, Secretary Rice was prepared to welcome him to the State Department headquarters. Noppadon initially replied in a non-committal fashion, saying he had regional travel to undertake during the same timeframe. However, after the Ambassador emphasized the value of a Washington visit on the occasion of the anniversary, Noppadon -- to the visible surprise of some staff members in the meeting -- agreed to the trip, even announcing this plan to journalists when he and the Ambassador had a joint press availability after the meeting.

HMONG REFUGEES

14. (C) The Ambassador said the USG wanted to encourage the RTG to establish a credible screening process to ensure that no one with a claim to refugee status would be forcibly repatriated to Laos. Citing Noppadon's recent visit to Laos, the Ambassador expressed hope that improving Thai-Lao relations would make this issue easier to resolve. Noppadon believed the GOL was becoming more receptive to the idea of third country resettlement of Hmong refugees in Thailand; the Lao were discussing this proposal within the GOL. Noppadon recognized the GOL considered this a sensitive, security-related issue, and the RTG wanted to work

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cooperatively with the Lao toward a solution. The Ambassador said the USG was also working bilaterally to reassure the GOL of USG respect for Lao sovereignty. The resettlement of Hmong refugees should be seen simply as a genuine humanitarian matter.

15. (C) Citing his plan to return to Laos in the coming days with Prime Minister Samak, Noppadon promised to convey the USG perspective to the GOL. The Ambassador added that it would also help if the GOL allowed international access to Hmong who returned to Laos. Noppadon expressed confidence that the Lao Foreign Minister would be receptive to international access to Hmong returnees.

BURMA AND KNU ASSASSINATION

16. (C) The Ambassador raised the February 14 assassination in northern Thailand of Karen National Union Secretary General Mahn Sha (reftel), noting that press reports indicated Burmese junta involvement in the killing. The Ambassador acknowledged Thailand's strategic concerns about the Thai-Burmese relationship but said the RTG could appropriately call its neighbor's attention to the assassination. After briefly consulting with MFA officials accompanying him in the meeting, Noppadon said he understood that the assassin was an ethnic Karen, and the Thai police were currently looking into the matter.

17. (C) The Ambassador emphasized President Bush and the First Lady were personally concerned about conditions in Burma, and the RTG would enhance its international standing by speaking out publicly about the importance of democracy there. Noppadon said the RTG would work closely with ASEAN to sustain momentum for democratization with Burma, and he would make a visit to Burma in the near future, tentatively scheduled for March 7-8. Echoing earlier public remarks, Noppadon said he believed that the RTG should adopt a policy of "neighborly engagement" with Burma, although he did not

specify what this term entailed.

DARFUR

18. (C) Noppadon told the Ambassador the RTG remained ready to send an infantry battalion to support the United Nations - African Union Mission in Darfur. He said he had raised this matter with UN Deputy Secretary General Asha-Rose Migiro, asking her to convey the RTG's interest to the relevant UN offices as well as to the Sudanese (who are as yet unwilling to accept the Thai contingent). The Ambassador welcomed the RTG's contribution as a valued component of an effort to save tens of thousands of lives, and he hoped that the disposition of the Thai contribution would be resolved by the time of Noppadon's prospective March trip to Washington.

PRIORITY WATCH LIST

19. (C) The RTG was determined to make progress on enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR), Noppadon said, and he requested the Ambassador's help in removing Thailand from the Special 301 Priority Watch List. Acknowledging ongoing debate within the RTG over compulsory licenses for pharmaceutical products, the Ambassador explained that USG concerns over IPR covered a broad range of areas beyond compulsory licenses. He volunteered that Embassy officials would be available to address any questions that RTG officials might have, especially as the RTG would be preparing a submission to USTR explaining its protection of

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IPR. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of the economic component of the U.S.-Thai relationship.

COMMENT

110. (C) We welcome Noppadon's decision to travel to Washington for the March 20 anniversary; we will work with MFA to iron out the details. Given Noppadon's plans to travel to Burma as the RTG is working to define a policy of "neighborly engagement," we will look for ways to influence the message Noppadon will bring to the Burmese.

JOHN